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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the scope of the problem of runaway children and presents treatment approaches currently in use. Several findings on runaway children are discussed: (1) the multiple social and psychological difficulties faced by parents; (2) the high degree of family strain; and (3) the runaways' dissatisfactions with peer and adult interpersonal relationships. The rationale and development of a comprehensive treatment program are described as program components consisting of child management, family enrichment, and interpersonal enrichment in a group work approach. A competency-based training model that facilitates juvenile justice workers' acquisition of skills to deliver this comprehensive treatment program is reviewed, and the evaluation methods to assess the competencies needed to implement the model are presented. (Author/NRB)

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COMPREHENSIVE TREATMENT OF RUNAWAY CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most perplexing yet critical problems confronting juvenile justice professionals is how to effectively treat families with runaway children. The seriousness and complexity of this social problem represents a difficult task for the worker who must be prepared to deal competently with children and their families. Yet there are still to be developed comprehensive training programs to prepare these workers to provide essential services to children and parents if families are to remain intact. Most treatment programs provide only one service to runaway children and families even though research indicates the causes of the difficulties are multiple, indicating that children and families need a variety of services.

The first section of the manuscript presents the rationale for the development and evaluation of a treatment program based on substantial empirical knowledge available from relevant social science disciplines. The treatment program's major objectives are to train the parents in child management procedures which facilitate the child's social and psychological development; family enrichment in terms of problem solving, conflict resolution, increasing positive interactions, and so forth to increase the quality of family life; and social enrichment programs for the children, i.e., helping children acquire social skills necessary to enhance their psychological and social development. The program is delivered through a group work approach.

In the second section, a review of a competency-based training

model with pre-entrance and post skill levels that facilitates juvenile justice workers' acquisition of necessary treatment skills to deliver such a comprehensive treatment program is presented, and means to assess the competencies to implement the model are reviewed.

Consistent Findings on Runaway Children

Data indicate that parents whose children run away face multiple social and psychological difficulties. The clearest empirical finding with regard to runaways seems to be the lack of consistency by the parent or parents in the handling of their children and the consequent lack of effectiveness in managing the child's behavior in such a manner that facilitates their psychological and social development. It has also been pointed out that another common feature of relationships between parents and runaway children is unrealistic expectations by the parents regarding what is appropriate behavior for their child. Juvenile justice workers should be prepared through learning packages to help parents know what to expect from their children, to learn procedures for teaching necessary social skills and tasks to their children, and to appropriately apply child management procedures. (Amanat and Able, 1973; Blood and D'Angelo, 1974; D'Angelo, 1974; Goldmeir and Dean, 1973; Greene, 1972; Hildebrand, 1968; Stierlin, 1973.

Another empirical finding of substance has been the high degree of strain evident in families. Family interaction patterns have been characterized as primarily negative; that is, parents engage in excessive amounts of criticism, threats, negative statements, physical punishment, and a corresponding lack of positive interaction such as positive statements, praise, positive physical contact, and so forth (Bock and English, 1973; Brandon and Folk, 1977; Brennan, Huizinga, and Elliott, 1978; Hildebrand, 1968; Robinson, 1978; Suddick, 1973; Vandeloo, 1977). In view of this finding, a comprehensive treatment approach should include appropriate interventions that teach communication skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, and so forth to family members.

Recent research isolates another major factor, that many runaway children are dissatisfied with interpersonal relationships with peers and adults in terms of the frequency of positive interactions and their perception of social adequacy and social relevance for their peers and families (Beyer, 1974; Brandon, 1975; Epps, 1976; Leventhal, 1964; Moriarity, 1975; Norem-Hebeisen, 1975; Wolf and Brandon, 1977). Thus, inadequately met social needs often precipitate runaway behavior. Juvenile justice workers must be trained through learning packages to identify social expectations and implement interpersonal skills training such as: social conversational skills

in how to introduce oneself, initiate and maintain conversation and give and receive compliments; enhancement of appearance and nonverbal communication; development of assertive behaviors for appropriate situations; and acquisition of planning, goal setting, problem-solving, and negotiation skills.

The pooling of data from these different research foci indicates therefore that a comprehensive treatment program would involve provision of service in several areas. It has been suggested that the reason why treatment programs have not produced significant results in treating runaway children is that they focus on only one of the factors that operate to produce runaway behavior, i.e., lack of child management skills, family dissatisfaction, or interpersonal dissatisfaction (Kehoe and Freer, 1977; Margolin, 1976). It is logical that an effective treatment approach to runaways must view the problem as multidetermined and services should be structured in such a manner. Thus, the comprehensive treatment program should consist of the following:

1. Child Management Program
2. Family Enrichment Program
3. Interpersonal Enrichment Program

Programs to accomplish the acquisition of requisite skills in each area are chosen from the technology of applied behavioral analysis. Recent reviews of parent training programs (Berkowitz and Graziano, 1972; Graziano, 1977; O'Dell, 1974), family enrichment (Bagarozzi and Wodarski, 1977 and 1978; Jacobson and Martin,

1976; Patterson and Fleischman, 1979), and interpersonal skills training (Lange and Jakubowski, 1976; Rich and Schroeder, 1976; Schinke and Rose, 1976) have shown that their effectiveness is substantial as compared to other treatment programs.

Behavioral Group Work Approach

Even though recent years have witnessed a growing emphasis on group treatment, relatively few clients are treated in this manner as compared to those treated individually. The provision of services in groups offers the following positive aspects: (1) the group interactional situation more frequently typifies many kinds of daily interactions. Services which facilitate the development of behaviors which enable people to interact in groups are likely to better prepare them for participation in larger society; that is, will help them learn social skills necessary to secure reinforcement (Feldman and Wodarski, 1975). (2) From a social learning theory perspective, it is posited that if a behavior is learned in a group context, it is likely to come under the control of a greater number of discriminative stimuli; therefore, greater generalization of the behavior can occur for a broader variety of interactional contexts. (3) Groups provide a context where new behaviors can be tested in a realistic atmosphere. That is, clients can get immediate peer feedback regarding their problem-solving behaviors. Likewise, they are provided with role models to facilitate the acquisition of requisite social behavior. (4) Groups provide a more

valid locus for accurate diagnosis and a more potent means for changing client behavior (Meyer and Smith, 1977; Rose, 1977). (5) The provision of services through groups greatly increases the number of clients that can be served by an effective treatment program. (6) Groups provide mechanisms for peer support for altered behavior. Peer relationships play a significant role in the runaway child's general dissatisfaction with life. Thus services structured in a group manner help provide a mechanism for these children to practice and be reinforced for new social skills which facilitate their acquisition. These skills in turn enhance their peer relationships and increase their satisfaction with life. Likewise, many parents of runaway children feel guilt, emptiness, and a sense of failure, and they, too, benefit from the support derived from the group.

Workers are trained to incorporate basic social learning principles that can be utilized in working with clients in groups (Wodarski, Feldman, and Flax, 1972; Feldman and Wodarski, 1975). The focus of the approach involves the use of contingency contracts, positive reinforcement to encourage clients to change their behavior, modeling various relevant requisite behaviors, and structuring reinforcements the group members can provide themselves, such as approval, to achieve treatment objectives.

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

(A) Child Management Program:

The child management program is based on Patterson's (1971 and 1975) work with families. The general components emphasized are:

1. General introduction to how the provision of certain consequences and stimuli can control behavior.
2. How to isolate and define a behavior to be changed.
3. The use of appropriate consequences to either increase or decrease a behavior.
4. Use of stimulus control techniques to influence rates of behavior.
5. Use of simple graphs and tables to chart behavioral change.

(B) Family Enrichment Program:

The Family Enrichment Program is based on Bagarozzi and Wodarski's (1977 and 1978) and Patterson's (1979) work on behavioral treatment of family discord. The general components emphasized are:

1. Problem identification, assessment and determination of treatment procedures.
2. Formalizing the treatment process.
3. Preliminary training in communication skills, problem solving and conflict resolution strategies, modeling of appropriate behavior, verbal instruction, nonverbal instruction, behavioral demonstration, instructional practice, feedback and reinforcement to precisely refine a response and verbal descriptions of possible future consequences for appropriate or inappropriate behavior.

4. Locating family relationship, reward inequities.
5. Formulation of exchange contracts.
6. Phasing out of concrete reinforcers and building in natural reinforcers to insure behavioral change.
7. Follow-up evaluation.

(C) The Social Enrichment Program:

This program is based on the work of Lange and Jakubowski (1976) involving interpersonal skills training such as conversational skills, enhancing appearance and use of appropriate nonverbal communication, and development of assertive behavior for appropriate situations. Specific elements that are emphasized include:

1. How to introduce oneself.
2. How to initiate conversations and continue them.
3. How to give and receive compliments.
4. How to enhance appearance.
5. How to make and refuse requests.
6. How to express feelings spontaneously.
7. Appropriate use of nonverbal behavior such as posture, gestures, eye contact, touching, interpersonal distance, body language, face, hands, and foot movement, and smiling.

Runaway adolescents identified as high risk in terms of coping with the daily problems of living, are taught a problem solving approach based on the work of D'Zurilla and Goldfried (1971), Goldfried and Goldfried (1975), and Spivack and Shure (1974).

The general components emphasized are:

1. How to generate information.
2. How to generate possible solutions.
3. How to evaluate possible courses of action.
4. How to choose and implement strategies through the following procedures:
   (a) General introduction to how the provision of certain consequences and stimuli can control problem-solving behavior.
   (b) Isolation and definition of a behavior to be changed.
   (c) Use of stimulus control techniques to influence rates of problem-solving behavior.
   (d) Use of appropriate consequences to either increase or decrease a behavior.
5. Verification of the outcome of the chosen course of action.

Competency Based Training Model

Training packages to incorporate all of these learning objectives have been developed for a competency based model program currently in operation for training juvenile justice workers.[1] Criteria are specified for the assessment of pre-entrance and exit skills to determine the effectiveness of the packages in regard to the learner's acquisition of the requisite skills. These include needs assessment, i.e. utilizing the developed efficacious and cost-effective assessment procedures to isolate physical, psychological, and social factors operating to produce runaways, and implementation of child management, family

[1]Manuals for implementation of each package are available from the author upon request.

enrichment, and social enrichment programs. Additionally, workers' performances are followed up and assessed following exposure to the training program to determine if the functions they were trained to perform are relevant in practice situations and actually reduce the incidence of runaway behavior. Such a measurement process enables us to assess the utility of the training packages in the improvement of the education of juvenile justice workers. The ultimate goal is the provision of education for juvenile justice workers on a more rational basis. The development of an educational model consisting of training packages utilizing videotapes, demonstrations, and simulations involving the acquisition of beginning practice skills, and so forth, with specified pre- and post-competency levels is particularly relevant for the variety of professionals who currently work as juvenile justice workers with diversified training backgrounds of undergraduate and graduate programs in social work, criminal justice, human services, sociology, psychology, guidance, and counseling.

Means Available to Assess Competencies

The term competency indicates an ability to demonstrate empirically that a juvenile justice worker possesses a certain skill. Depending upon the specific skill, evaluations are conducted through means of: 1) videotapes of practitioner behavior; 2) inventories designed to measure specific academic and practice skills; 3) behavioral observations using time-sampling procedures; and 4) struc-

tured and unstructured interviews with supervisors, clients, and seasoned agency practitioners. In all feasible instances, multicriterion measurementsare utilized in order to provide for the assessment of the multidimensions of learning.

1. In-course training evaluation. Paper and pencil tests have been developed for each training package to assess the acquisition of the practitioners' academic knowledge. This is accomplished by means of pre-testing pre-entrance skills and post-testing exit skills to determine whether the training materials have accomplished their objectives. For example, the practitioners are asked to do a family analysis in terms of determining helping behaviors that exist and how they can be used to enhance the quality of family interaction.

2. Practice observation. As part of the training procedure, practitioners are evaluated on relevant practice skills through audio and video tapes and behavioral observations. Videotaping is used also to provide checks on the observational procedures and to provide feedback to practitioners.

3. Interviews and attitude testing. At designated times interviews are conducted with clients, supervisors, and agency executive personnel to assess the adequacy of the training experience. Such procedures facilitate any modifications that may be necessary in the training packages.

4. Follow-up. Several months following completion of training, participating practitioners are contacted to determine what skills they are using that were acquired in their education. Also,

observers are sent to their agencies to note which procedures are being used and how they are being used. Such procedures provide data which are rarely available on the adequacy of training for professional careers.

Implementation and Evaluation

The effects of training are being tested by comparing fifteen families who receive the training with fifteen familes who receive regular juvenile court services. Fifteen familes with prosocial children will also provide a basis for comparison.

Selection Criterion

Parents and children are administered a battery of self inventories assessing the following:

1. Attitudes toward parents and children (Parental and Children's Attitudes Scales).
2. Family satisfaction, quality of family life (Family Environment Scale, Dyadic Adjustment Scale and The Life Experiences Survey).
3. Social satisfaction (Index of Social Satisfaction for Parents/Children).
4. Self reports of deviant acts (Survey of Youth).[2]

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[2]Copies of the various inventories are available upon request from the author.

Previous research by Hudson indicates that a score of 30 or above on the Parental Attitude Toward Child Scale, Child Attitude Toward Parent Scale, and Social Satisfaction Scale provides the criteria for selecting those who should benefit from the program (Hudson, 1976; Hudson and Glisson, 1976; Hudson and Proctor, 1976). A similar criterion using pilot data currently being collected will be established for quality of family life. Additionally, data on deviant acts are being collected to assess how this relates to treatment outcome and predicting runaway behavior. Parents and children who score above the necessary criteria on any three of these categories of measures are asked to participate in the program. If the requirement were imposed that parents and children had to score above the necessary criteria on all measures, the procedural difficulties involved in securing such participants for the project might be too costly. Also, empirical data do not exist to impose such stringent criteria. Data, however, are secured on all four categories of measures to assess whether such precise criteria can be imposed and how the measures relate to treatment outcome.

A behavioral observation scale is administered to assess the following parental behaviors directed toward their children: directions and commands, physical contact, praise, positive attention, holding, criticisms, threats, negative attention, and so forth, and the incidence of prosocial, nonsocial and antisocial behavior exhibited by the children. The behavioral observational scale is based on the author's previous research involving measuring the behaviors of antisocial children and prosocial children and their group therapists at a community center. Reliabilities of the group therapist's behaviors averaged .90, and for the children .93 (Wodarski, Feldman, and Pedi, 1974; Wodarski and Pedi, 1978).

Reliability

Reliability of the behavioral observational scale is consistently high for parent and child behavior. Behavioral observers are trained by videotapes illustrating the behaviors on the checklist. After initial training, reliability is assessed before each data collection session. Reliability of the self inventory are as follows:

Parental and Children's Attitude Scale = .95 (Giluli and Hudson, 1977; Hudson, 1977)

Index of Family Life = .92, average of three measures (Patterson, 1979)

Index of Social Satisfaction = .93 (Hudson and Proctor, 1976)

Self Report of Deviant Acts = .92 (Conger, 1979).

Self inventories are administered by separately trained individuals. These individuals are instructed to administer the inventories in such a manner as to reduce any confounding of the data by demand characteristics, expectation effects, and so forth.

Discussion

The competency based program model should start to provide systematic knowledge concerning one of the most perplexing but crucial problems confronting mental health professionals; that is, how to effectively treat runaway children and their families. The development of packages for the training of juvenile justice workers with specification of pre-entrance and exit skills represents a critical, yet relatively unexplored area in facilitating the acquisition of necessary practice skills. From a practical standpoint, one of the largest gains will be the development of an effective educational program for juvenile justice workers who work with parents whose children run away.

Substantial research indicates that practitioners adopt procedures more readily when little additional effort is required. Thus adoption of the training package will be facilitated by the ease with which the completed training manuals, ancillary training materials, and criterion referenced evaluation procedures to assess acquisition of the necessary skills for successful practice may be used.

Moreover, the program should delineate the relative diagnostic and predictive potency of selected self-inventories and behavioral observation on determining which children will run away. This aspect of the project should facilitate the development of criteria for determining how services should be offered. This would increase the juvenile courts' ability to provide appropriate services in families, halfway houses, foster homes, short term detention facilities and so forth, and thus lead to the maintenance of the family unit.

To reduce or prevent runaway behavior it will be necessary to offer new ways of developing behaviors that will bring children reinforcement. The proposed program combines several means of effectively changing behavior for families whose children run away. Each aspect is chosen for the strong empirical base upon which it rests.

It seems probable that successful completion of this research and subsequent research will stimulate endeavors by related agencies and thus increase the availability of mental health services to families with runaway children. Hence, considerations regarding the practical utility, as well as the purely theoretical desiderata, serve to highlight the significance of the program.

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